

International Conference
New Media Configurations - Changing Societies?
**Current Research Perspectives on South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East
and North Africa**

Host: DFG research network Medialisation and social change outside Europe:
South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Arab-speaking region
Organisation: Nadja-Christina Schneider, Cross-sectional department for Mediality and Intermediality
Venue: Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Room 315
Date: November 28-30, 2013

Conference Program

Thu, 28 Nov

15:30-16:00pm

Conference registration

16:00-17:30pm

Panel I: Research, Media Art and Documentary Filmmaking

Moderation: JAMILA ADELI (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

VASANTHI MARIADASS (Srishti College of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore, India)

Archival Practice by Harun Farocki: Effects and Affects

SOPHIE ERNST (Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands)

An intellectual history of the power point presentation:

How a 'new media' machine was adapted and integrated into the art of projection; a case study of Japan and the Netherlands

ULRIKE MOTHES (Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany)

Self-reflexive documentary film in India

18:00-19:30pm

Welcome address:

PETER A. FRENCH (Vice President for Research, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

Opening remarks:

NADJA-CHRISTINA SCHNEIDER (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

Keynote lecture:

MAITRAYEE CHAUDHURI (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India)

Media and Gender in India: What is Old? What is New?

Moderation: NADJA-CHRISTINA SCHNEIDER (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

20:00pm

Documentary Film Screening:

ULRIKE MOTHES (Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany)

Women's Police Station (2013)

Detailed Conference program & registration at: <http://iaaw.hu-berlin.de/medialitaet/conference>
(from mid-September onwards)

Contact: newmediaconfigurations@hu-berlin.de

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Fri, 29 Nov
8.30-9:00am
Conference registration

9:00-11.00am

Panel II: The political economy of media: Politics, Ownership and Technologies

Moderation: CAROLA RICHTER (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany) &
BETTINA GRÄF (Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, Germany)

MELANIE RADUE (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany)

Myanmar's Bumpy Road to Media Freedom

NADIA LEIHS (Universität Erfurt, Germany)

Persisting Powers, Fragmentation and Trust. Transforming the Egyptian Media System

OMAIR ANAS (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India)

Arab media after Arab Spring: A Study of Al-Jazeera's Audiences

11:30-13:00pm

Keynote lecture:

ZIAD FAHMY (Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA)

Media-Capitalism: A Historical Perspective on Media and Society in Early Twentieth Century Egypt

Commentary: BETTINA GRÄF (Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, Germany)

14:00-15:30pm

Panel III: Changing Media and Religious Renegotiations

Moderation: JENS KUTSCHER (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany)

Comments: PATRICK EISENLOHR (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany)

Input Statements:

WAI WENG HEW (Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, Germany)

Dakwah 2.0: Digital Dakwah and Its Implications in Indonesia and Malaysia

JEANINE DAGYELI (Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Germany)

Pious Admonitions - Middle Eastern Islamist Videos and their Pathways to Central Asia

XENIA ZEILER (Universität Bremen, Germany)

Renegotiating Hinduism via Digital Media: Indian Digital Games provoking Global Debates on 'Being Hindu'

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16:00-17:00pm

Poster Session

EVA EICHENAUER (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

Language, mass media and democracy: A Malaysian case study

SHAMEEM MAHMUD (Universität Hamburg, Germany)

From digital divide to digital culture - emergence of online public spheres in Bangladesh

QURRATULAIN ZAMAN (Deutsche Welle Academy, Bonn, Germany)

The influence of twitter on political mobilization of youth: A case study of Pakistan

MAX KRAMER (Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Germany)

Representation of Kashmiri identities in digital films

17:00-18:00pm

Lecture & Afternoon Tea:

MARWAN M. KRAIDY (University of Pennsylvania, USA)

Plato's Digital Cave? The Arab Uprisings as Battles of Representation

Sat, 30 Nov

10:00-12:00am

Panel IV: Media Changing Identities: Focus on Gender

Moderation: FRITZI-MARIE TITZMANN (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

DREDGE KANG (Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA)

Idols of Development: The Queer Convergence of New Media and Korean Dance Performance in Thailand

XENIA GLEISSNER (University of Exeter, London, UK)

Women as Representations of Class and Modernity: Gendered Public Visibility on National TV in the United Arab Emirates

JESNA JAYACHANDRAN (Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, India)

Debating rape in India: Readers' comments in the online public sphere

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13:00-15:00pm

Panel V: What is new about new media? Converging Media - Changing Practices

Moderation and Input Statement: MARCUS MICHAELSEN (Universität Erfurt, Germany)

SARAH MCKEEVER (King's College, London, UK)

Mobile violence: Communalism in India and ICT Intervention

ARNIKA FUHRMANN (Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA)

"Shallow News in Depth": An Internet Television Intervention in Thailand

DINA ABOU ZEID (Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt)

Egyptian Comics on Facebook as a New Type of Citizen Media and Political Activism

FRITZI-MARIE TITZMANN (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Media mobility and convergence within India's matrimonial market

16:00-17:00pm

Concluding remarks and discussion

Comments:

Johanna Buß (Universität Wien, Austria)

Carola Richter (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

Nadja-Christina Schneider (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"

Panel 1: Research, Media Art and Documentary Filmmaking

Dr. Vasanthi Mariadass (Srishti College of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore, India)

"Archival Practice by Harun Farocki: Effects and Affects"

Abstract:

Harun Farocki's documentaries are most often constituted by found footage and fragments from archives: they are perhaps forgotten, discarded or obscure remains of other works or archives. Therefore his films are citations edited and compiled into an archive and my paper will examine his archival practice in order to illustrate the effects and affects produced by them. In sum they are counter narratives to media doctored politics and he uses the very same material to take them to less known destination. Farocki's archives are relentlessly and carefully re-documenting and retelling narratives that do not always reach main stream politics. However, he uses those well known politics and hence they comes across as obvious and didactic. I argue that they are his tactics, because he supplements them with other footages which are contingent with his meticulous formal economy in order to tell other narratives: they are repressions that he excavates to counter dominant discourses/narratives. My primary question here will be: What is the relationship between the narrative practice and the archive impinging and embedded in them?

For most part my paper is influenced by Derrida's Archive Fever (1995) which examines the presuppositions of archival practice and the infomatics culture we live in. While Judith Butler's Frames of War (2010) confirmed the possibilities of found footage redirected to form counter narratives. She unpacks the presuppositions of media managed politics of "interventionist" war in the recent times while citing Farocki's film War at a Distance (2003) and Eye Machine I, II, III (2001-3). My interest in formal analysis via poststructural and postcolonial theories provides the necessary framework for my analysis of Farocki's work. Through them I discern the formal and the political intertwine to discover narratives countering main stream/ media politics.

His work is at once constituted by meta cinematic/ meta documentary practice, formal aspects that engages with New Wave experimental cinema. Furthermore, he extends the Brechtian theoretical prescriptions which were otherwise limited by the New Wave cinema and modernist work in general. By re-representing the obvious or known formal, political or theoretical concerns he not only interrogates but sustains them to produce and speculate on perspectives that are not easily perceptible. Perceptibility is retarded because subjectivity and normalizing discourse engendered by desire and politics dominate and eclipse cognition—a very challenging task indeed for counter narratives.

His narratives like most modernist work emphasize a distancing, alienating, calculative and objective stance and hence they encourage critical cognitive effect. However, I argue that he extends the modernist practice to suture the affective with the critical response to rethink and reframe. I demonstrate the affective functions with varying levels of haunting, nostalgia, pensive speculations, poignancies, pathos along with a search for the unknown/repressed. In other words they include both the cognitive and affective charge that involuntarily haunts the viewers. My analysis of Farocki's formal expressions will demonstrate how they recharge the visual with the affective and speculative concerns that are quietly and sometimes fleetingly manifested as a flicker on the screen.

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Panel 1: Research, Media Art and Documentary Filmmaking

Sophie Ernst (doctoral candidate, Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands)

"An intellectual history of the power point presentation: How a 'new media' machine was adapted and integrated into the art of projection; a case study of Japan and the Netherlands"

Abstract:

Projection as a method of investigation

When looking at the technical development of the (media-)projector, it is noteworthy how initially its content was synonymous to the medium. The machine used to projecting skulls, monsters, and devils was named the lantern of fear. This changed and the medium was dissociated from its initial content, which prompts the question what of its original meaning does remain. I intend to describe a separation that was gradually made between 'on-screen' magic and 'off-screen' reality, resulting in the notion of the screen as a window or canvas. I want to contrast experiments with fields of projection to the use of projection screens.

Dutch artist and proponent of the movement 'de Stijl' Theo van Doesburg said, in a new medium there is always a period of material experimentation where the medium is explored before it is used in its full worth as a tool for Gestaltung - to shape. I argue that this is not necessarily true. One could tell the story of the lantern as a tool with potential for terror and deception that ended up as a mundane device in education (diapositive and finally power point). In Europe this device was fitted with a content and context, whereas at the same time in Japan there was an existing content and context into which the medium was fitted.

I want to zoom in on the moment in its history when the lantern was used in exploring ideas of 'magic', illusion and reality. What was the relation between magic projections and the orientation of the viewer? Doesburg sees experimentation in film-art as a intuitive tendency to observe the world in an alternative dimension - "die Welt aus einer neuen Dimension ... betrachten". What happens when we research, find out, experiment, amaze, mesmerize and investigate by way of projecting like the magic lantern projectionists did?

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Panel 1: Research, Media Art and Documentary Filmmaking

Ulrike Mothes (doctoral candidate, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany)

"Self-reflexive documentary films in India"

Abstract

Ulrike Mothes' presentation deals with the influences of film-aesthetic form and narrative strategies of recent documentary films in India. Film was brought to India as a colonial medium of entertainment and ethnographic record, and was soon taken over by Indian filmmakers. The state-funded documentary sought to distance itself from western documentary perspectives, and played a crucial role in the nation building process of Independent India in the 1950ies and 60ies. Starting from the 1970ies, the institutional documentary representations were questioned by independent filmmakers. On low budgets, they produced activist films about social and political injustices, to initiate change. During this time, the filmmakers focused strongly on the represented issues and responded skeptically to formal and structural explorations of the documentary genre. Art films were considered empty play of forms. To what extent do international funding and co-production systems, a new interest in Indian documentaries within the western festival circuit and a growing documentary audience within India today provide a turning point for young as well as established filmmakers to discover new forms of documentary expression?

By way of example, Ulrike Mothes' reflections are pivoting on Ranjan Palit's video diary "In Camera", a personal retrospection of his 25-year practice as a cinematographer in Indian documentaries. Palit's approach of shot taking, voice over and montage are located within the aesthetics and narrative style of nonfiction film in India, to which he contributed tremendously by participating in numerous important productions. The talk discusses Palit's documentary treatment of his own archival material and his artistic form of self-reflection.

"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"

Keynote lecture

Prof PhD Maitrayee Chaudhuri (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India)

"Media and Gender in India: What is Old? What is New?"

Abstract

An initial contention of the Indian women's movement in the 1970s was the stark invisibility of the women's question in public discourse. Four decades later gender is hyper-visible in a fast growing and technologically sophisticated Indian media. This hyper-visibility of women, gender and sexuality in contemporary Indian media has to be understood in the context of three linked but disparate developments: a women's movement which has made far reaching impact on state and non-state policies; neo-liberal restructuring which has spawned a widespread consumer culture – one which the media has actively promoted and one within which gender plays a pivotal role; and a media industry that looms large in public life by its sheer scale, convergence and technological prowess. This intersection is new and important to address.

What however is old, and which also needs to be taken into account is the centrality of the women's question in modern Indian public discourse from the early 19th century social reform movement, through the early 20th century nationalist and women's movement, it has been the central site within which public debates on nationalism, culture, tradition, modernity, religion, individual rights and cultural identity were fought upon. There was a retreat of the women's question from public discourse after independence and resurgence with the Indian women's movement in the 1970s. The Shah Bano Case and the Deorala Sati case in mid 1980s once again brought back many of the old contestations such as cultural rights versus gender rights centre stage. The media was implicated within this. Important to my argument is however that the nature of the media during this entire period was different. It had neither the broader political economy set up by neo-liberalism, nor the technological sophistication of an interactive media, nor a publicity driven culture which is constitutive of the media today. It is this transformed media which was both an actor and a central site for representing the public outcry against the gruesome case of rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012. The wide range of responses in the aftermath of the incident primarily in the English language media, both electronic and print brought forth many new issues which I argue is reflective of both the changes that Indian society on one hand and the Indian media on the other have undergone. A central question that underpins the paper is whether greater visibility in media means greater democratization and gender justice?

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Panel 2: The Political Economy of Media: Politics, Ownership and Technologies

Melanie Radue (Research Assistant, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany)

"Myanmar's Bumpy Road to Media Freedom"

Abstract

The media with their social and political impact is often considered a change agent within and for democratization processes. Castells (2001, 2004) emphasizes the potential of the network society to create social transformation processes and states a drift of vertical powers (hegemony) to horizontal "counter-powers". I propose that the dependency on context is essential for potential changes due to democratization processes which can lead to the development of a free and plural media system. Therefore, the analysis of the specific context is the basis of the consideration of Myanmar's contemporary way to media freedom.

Based on qualitative interviews with 20 different local and international experts and media practitioners this article considers the current changing media landscape in the wake of political changes in Myanmar. The analysis predominantly reflects the interdependencies of ongoing transformations of the political system and the media landscape and presents the current challenges, opportunities and risks for journalists and media practitioners occurring with this transformation.

Before the coup by the military in 1962, Myanmar enjoyed freedom of the press to the extent that even criticism of the monarchy was permissible. After the military takeover in 1962, public access to media was restricted by draconian laws.

Due to international pressure and suffering from economic sanctions, the military government was forced to proceed with the realization of the 2003 announced "roadmap to democracy", which led to general elections in 2010 and the inauguration of new President Thein Sein in February 2011.

In the wake of these developments, Myanmar has witnessed a liberalization of the media landscape, the release of journalists and political prisoners, and the initiation of a political dialogue between the government, the opposition, civil society groups, and at least the media. For the first time since 1962, no journalists are imprisoned in Myanmar. For two generations Myanmar was considered one of the most dangerous places for critical journalists. This shift is having an enormous effect on the development of the Myanmar media landscape. The most important step to decrease the control of the media by the government was the abolition of censorship prior to publication in August 2012.

Now journalists have the opportunity to operate more freely giving them the opportunity to act as a watchdog and play a democratic role in society. Still, all publications are monitored by the PSRD after publication. This surveillance pressures the media and encourages self-censorship.

The new fragile freedom along with existing laws brings new challenges. Hence, journalists and editors face a new situation. Now the censors are no longer responsible for the content of publications, the predominantly young and inexperienced journalists and editors are accountable themselves. For nearly five decades the media coverage in Myanmar predominantly consisted of governmental propaganda, descriptive and biased coverage, and a still widespread cronyism in the media sector. This still distracts journalists as well as the civil and political society from communicating their needs and attitudes on crucial topics in a critical and creative manner.

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Panel 2: The Political Economy of Media: Politics, Ownership and Technologies

Nadia Leihls (doctoral candidate, Uni Erfurt/Uni Dortmund, Germany)

"Persisting Powers, Fragmentation and Trust. Transforming the Egyptian Media System"

Abstract

In Egypt, the protests in early 2011 and the resulting ouster of president Hosni Mubarak triggered a surge of new print publications, TV channels, and grass-root media collectives. Still, freedom of expression is highly contested and this leaves observers doubting the existenc of a free Egyptian media system in the future.

In order to reinforce their prerogative of interpretation, the now ruling Muslim Brotherhood appointed their own sympathizers to chief executives in the state-controlled media. Thus, by using means to retain power invented by the former regime, they fatally damaged initiatives to reform these institutions from the inside. Similiarly worrying are the delay in reforming media laws and bodies as well as the increase of legal attacks on outspoken journalists and presenters. The private media market remained tightly in the hands of businessmen advanced in the time of the Mubarak regime. In the highly contested market some new publications already failed and had to close down due to the economic situation and lack of advertising revenues. This market drive in addition to fierce competition in the political field have led to an even more polarized media scarcely suitable to restore citizen's trust in the professionalism of media workers or to help create a vital public sphere.

Research suggests that although new communication channels like blogs or social media played a powerful role in the evolution of revolts from Tunisia to Turkey, the success of political activism relied heavily on more traditional ways of communication, namely personal interaction and TV talk shows. Media collectives like "Mosireen" as well as individual bloggers – some of them journalists who discovered the Internet as a space to escape the burdens of censorship and self-censorship long before 2011 – certainly enjoy the trust of their followers. Nevertheless media audiences in the Internet are fragmented and do not represent a public sphere in its entirety.

In the light of these considerations, Egypt and its media need to strive further in order to develop an environment eligible for free and fair discourse and finally the establishment of democratic institutions – the same seems to apply for countries like Tunisia and Libya. Media institutions need to regain the trust of the public to be able to lobby for thorough legal reforms and amendments to the constitution. One way to do so might be to establish suitable means of self-regulation, transparency and accountability.

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Panel 2: The Political Economy of Media: Politics, Ownership and Technologies

Omaisr Anas (doctoral candidate, JNU Delhi, India)

„Arab media after Arab Spring: A Study of Al-Jazeera’s Audiences“

Abstract

Initially it was called a Facebook revolution or that Twitter revolution, and then it came to Al Jazeera which was given much credit to provoke protesters against their regimes. Media’s own agenda was never associated with these kinds of projects because they claim to abide by values of objectivity and neutrality in any conflict. However there has always been a strong demand or expectation from many quarters that Al Jazeera and other Arab media play a ‘role’ in bringing a change sometime and somewhere and discourage change in some other places. Audiences are gradually appearing to influence many things in media’s agenda setting.

Why didn’t Al Jazeera succeed to provoke major public anger against Palestinian authority’s alleged “sell out” of Palestinian land under a swap deal which Al Jazeera disclosed via exclusive Wikileaks cables? This was most important news on Al Jazeera when Tunisian protests were engulfing from a village to other cities. Al Jazeera’s coverage of Egyptian protests also started very late and with less confidence of change. Then it took an entirely different shift when protests emerged in Bahrain and flip flopped again when it came to Syria. Al Jazeera’s position kept changing from one to other and hence its credibility went significantly down among Arab audiences. Now the question is if Al Jazeera has ability to facilitate change agenda from one direction to its logical end. After Arab Spring and successful democratic transition in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, the social and political landscape has become more diverse and more vocal. This new democratic wave will have another impact on media’s role in Arab society.

This paper intends to question Arab media’s basic assumptions and their failures to meet expectations of all stakeholders including the audiences. This paper will also look into how entire news media business is facing a resetting to adjust more local and regional voices and how this change is also redirecting typologies of Arab media. This paper will be based on a survey about Al Jazeera’s audiences’ responses after Arab spring.

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Keynote lecture

Prof PhD Ziad Fahmy (Associate Professor, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA)

"Media-Capitalism: A Historical Perspective on Media and Society in Early Twentieth Century Egypt"

Abstract

Twentieth Century Egypt.

The popular culture of early twentieth century Egypt did more than entertain—it created a nation. Songs, jokes, and satire, comedic sketches, plays, and poetry, all provided an opportunity for discussion and debate about national identity and an outlet for resistance to British and elite authority. This presentation will examine how, popular media and culture provided ordinary Egyptians with a framework to construct and negotiate a modern national identity.

My presentation will shift the typical focus of study away from the intellectual elite to understand the rapid politicization of the growing literate middle classes while bringing the semi-literate and illiterate urban masses more fully into the historical narrative. I will introduce the concept of "media-capitalism," which expands the analysis of nationalism beyond print alone to incorporate sound, audiovisual and performance media. It was through these various media that a collective camaraderie crossing class lines was formed and, as this presentation will uncover, an Egyptian national identity emerged.

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Panel 3: Changing Media and Religious Renegotiations

Dr. Wai Weng Hew (Research Fellow, Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, Germany)

"Dakwah 2.0: Digital Dakwah and Its Implications in Indonesia and Malaysia"

Abstract

In recent years, Muslim religiosity in Malaysia and Indonesia is not only negotiated in various physical place (from mosques to shopping malls), but also contested in numerous cyber spaces (from blogosphere to Facebook). The digital facilitates the spread and discussion of religious knowledge and forms of practice among Muslims, without encountering a physical place of worship, or a religious scholar. Various Muslim activists have creatively used various types of new media to conduct dakwah (dissemination of Islamic messages), which some of them called 'digital dakwah'. Yet, whether the diversification of dakwah mediums will lead to the greater pluralisation of Islamic discourses? Does new media contributes to a new type of religiosity? What are the differences and interactions between their 'online dakwah' and 'offline dakwah'? By looking at the digital dakwah of Chinese Muslims, this paper aims to address the above-mentioned questions.

Given that the mainstream media (especially government-controlled and ethnicised newspapers in Malaysia) provide limited coverage to Chinese Muslims' dakwah activities, Chinese Muslims (mostly are new converts) creatively use cyber spaces as avenues to share their conversion experience, express their ethno-religious identities, and spread Islamic messages to non-Muslim audiences. Not only connecting Chinese converts who are minorities in both Malaysia and Indonesia, internet is also linking Chinese converts to Hui Muslims in China and Muslim converts in the West, which might contribute to new form of online translocal ummah network (see <http://revertedmuslim.blogspot.de> and www.mualaf.com). Together with other forms of dakwah (such as building Chinese-style mosques and Chinese halal restaurants), media-savvy converts-turned-preachers such as Koko Liem, Syafii Antonio and Firdaus Wong use Facebook, You-tube and blogs to express both their Islamic religiosity and Chinese cultural identity, leading to an emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities in contemporary Malaysia and Indonesia. Unlike conventional dakwah activities, which aiming at strengthening the faith of Muslims, Chinese Muslims' digital dakwah aims to universalise Islam and invite non-Muslims to get closer to the Islamic faith. Nevertheless, while such digital dakwah constitutes new forms and new targets of Islamic preaching, a closer look on their contents might cautious us that the diversity of forms do not necessarily contribute to the plurality of discourses. Moreover, alongside with 'digital dakwah', Chinese Muslims also conduct 'street dakwah', showing that 'online dakwah' is complementing, not substituting 'offline dakwah'.

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Panel 3: Changing Media and Religious Renegotiations

Dr. Jeanine Dageyeli (Postdoc, BGSMCS, Germany)

„Pious Admonitions – Middle Eastern Islamist Videos and their Pathways to Central Asia“

Abstract

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many Central Asian Muslims were left with a feeling of religious inadequacy due to the limited access to Islamic canonical texts and an interrupted knowledge transfer during Soviet times. While missionaries of different Islamic denominations became active in Central Asia during the 1990s, Central Asians themselves travelled to the Middle East and Turkey to study or work. Middle Eastern scripturalist interpretations of Islam soon came to represent »true Islam« to many Central Asians and were employed to counter local religious interpretations and social hierarchy. Scripturalist knowledge from the Middle East – evaluated as superior to local knowledge – was mainly embraced by young males. By referring to Middle Eastern Islam (allegedly closer to the sacred origins and untainted by socialism), they managed to surpass social hierarchy and acquired a religious status allowing them to successfully challenge interpretative rights of those who traditionally held religious authority.

Quick to get acquainted with new technologies, they also introduced semi-professional religious video and internet material from the Middle East, mainly from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates to Central Asia. It consists largely of pious admonitions, exempla stories and warnings of dire consequences in the afterlife. The material is disseminated via CD and, during the last years, also through MMS. Because of restrictions on access and insufficient supply, internet plays an inferior role in dissemination. From the mid-2000s onwards, governments in Central Asia adopted an increasingly critical attitude towards scripturalist Islam. CDs are now handled secretly and are increasingly destroyed after watching. The video material considered here is not used to voice political concerns or claims but rather serves as an authoritative backing to renegotiate social relations and hierarchies within families and larger village or city quarter communities.

This paper is based on field research in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and on the analysis of original video material.

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Panel 3: Changing Media and Religious Renegotiations

Dr. Xenia Zeiler (Lektorin, University Bremen, Germany)

„Renegotiating Hinduism via Digital Media: Indian Digital Games provoking Global Debates on ‚Being Hindu‘“

Abstract

By today, digital media are inherent part of popular culture in contemporary India. One of the increasingly important digital media genres – especially for a broad urban middle-class audience – is digital gaming. Though it rapidly evolves and though, by today, it has to be counted among the media genres which define the new media configurations in South Asian contexts, research on digital games so far primarily concentrates on European and U.S. settings. But digital games influence cultural and social transformations in India, in general, and also contribute to reshape and (de)construct details of religious ideas and beliefs. As such, this popular media genre serves as one of many platforms to negotiate religious identity and authority in contemporary India and representations of Hindu symbols, ideas and beliefs, on the subcontinent as well as in the ‘West’.

Digital games – produced in the West as well as in India – included some ‘Hindu’ topics ever since digital media emerged. But already the first entirely India-developed digital game based on Hindu mythology in detail, ‘Hanuman: Boy Warrior’ (SONY 2009 for PlayStation 2), caused heated debates on representations of Hindu values and an alleged disregard of Hindu deities in gaming environments. Significantly, the protests against the game focussed on one particular genre specific issue, namely on the possibility to allegedly control and manipulate a deity’s representation through technical means of the gaming genre. The changes from solely representing a deity in textual or visual narrative frames, as in filmic genres, to actively modifying the narrative, as in the gaming genre, led to completely new lines of argumentation in recent negotiations of Hinduism. The changes in media and media practices then led to altered religious renegotiations.

This paper analyses the intense debate initiated by Hindu organisations in India and in the Indian diaspora and aims at disclosing underlying processes of renegotiating religious identity and authority. It also wishes to address some of the key questions emerging in the new field of research on Indian digital games. It discusses the role of digital games as an important new media genre and as new platform for renegotiations of religious, cultural and social identity and authority in contemporary Indian and Indian diaspora popular culture and society.

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Poster Session

Eva Eichenauer (M.A. student, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

„Language, mass media and democracy: A Malaysian case study“

Abstract

Malaysia is commonly referred to as a semi-authoritarian democracy with a highly controlled media landscape. Yet, in recent years, this assumption has been increasingly challenged by the growing impact that the Internet has had on media productions. Not since the massive political changes that have taken place during and after the “Arab spring” the Internet has been perceived as a key tool for disseminating information and creating alternative realities that contest the coverage of national press agencies or state-controlled media. In Malaysia, too, the Internet has widely been seen as a key force behind the political changes triggered by the elections in March 2008, often referred to in Malaysia as a “political tsunami”.

Following Niklas Luhmann's systems theoretical approach, I argue that media construct reality and serve to create shared knowledge as a basis for individual and collective communication and action. The creation of different and alternative realities through mass media is essential in democratization processes (Luhmann 2000). Through a comparative media analysis, this paper examines the media coverage of the print dailies Utusan Malaysia and The Star as well as the online news site Malaysiakini on the “Allah issue” that gained momentum in early 2010, when the High Court allowed Christians in Malaysia to use the term Allah for addressing God in their religious services and publications. This paper offers interesting empirical findings for pluralist contestations of reality, since both English- and Malaysian-language as well as on- and offline media were included in the analysis. Although one might assume that because of the highly controlled print media, Malaysia's realities are challenged only via “online dissent”, this study suggests that Malaysia's linguistically plural public sphere offers multiple re-presentations of reality even within the highly restricted context print publications operate in. Hence, this paper argues that, even though technological innovations do offer spaces to create alternative realities, in a multi-lingual national context as in Malaysia, the interrelation between language and news content is an even more crucial element of constructing shared knowledge and collective identities.

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Poster Session

Shameem Mahmud (doctoral candidate, University of Hamburg, Germany)

"From digital divide to digital culture – emergence of online public spheres in Bangladesh"

Abstract

Bangladesh, a South Asian nation with a population of 160 million, falls within the bracket of 'haves not' in any discussion on digital divide, which is generally conceptualised as inequalities of access to digital communication technologies. The orthodox view on digital divide discussion argues that these inequalities ultimately lead to socio-economic and democratic deficit in the societies. This paper differs with this theoretical concept to understand larger impacts of digital media in developing countries like Bangladesh and proposes to examine cultural impacts of new digital media instead of narrow focus on the quantitative measures of technological access. It makes the argument that despite limited access to online media, a small but strong online-based public sphere is being developed in Bangladesh as alternative to traditional print and broadcast media based public sphere.

The theoretical framework of this study is two-folds. First, it takes Balnaves and colleagues' (2009) analytical framework of 'digital culture' to understand changing media landscape of Bangladesh, thus divorcing it from the theoretical domain of 'digital divide'. As mentioned, the digital culture emphasises social and cultural analyses of the phenomena in the societies. The second theoretical concept is found in Habermas's (1989) normative theory of public sphere – 'a domain of social life in which public opinion is expressed by means of rational public discourse and debate'.

Using the 'Shahbag Protests' as a case for analysis, this paper explores nature and trends of online media usage in mobilizing political demonstration that was to protest a war crime tribunal judgment. Tens of thousands of people took to Dhaka streets in February 2013 following protest calls in social media by Bangladeshi online activists and bloggers.

Findings of the study suggest a clear transformation of political communication patterns in Bangladesh where Internet and mobile phones play significant roles in mobilizing people. Bangladeshi bloggers and online activists form virtual communities through processes of interaction, engagement, participation and affinity on contemporary socio-political issues that often extends to real life events, and ultimately suggests emergence of alternative public spheres. However, these spheres rely heavily on traditional news media and mainstream social media (e.g., Facebook) for content and issue generation.

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Poster Session

Qurratulain Zaman, M.A. (Deutsche Welle Academy, Bonn, Germany)

"The influence of twitter on political mobilization of youth: A case study of Pakistan"

Abstract:

Social media tools such as FB and Twitter are becoming increasingly important in Pakistani politics - especially with a view to mobilize young voters, as demonstrated in the recent elections. The users of digital media are mainly young people, aged between 18-35. The paper analyses to which extent and how social media tools and particularly Twitter are used by the youth and the political parties in Pakistan for the discussion of politics and political mobilization.

Twitter has particular functions in the Pakistani political discourse. One example is information and discussion about issues related to taboos, like the Balochistan conflict. In the May 2013 elections, many reports about rigging and violence were also published first by citizens on the social media and then picked up by mainstream media. With the precarious security situation during the election campaign, political parties targeted by militants like the Awami National Party announced that they would campaign on social media, rather than holding public rallies. The use of Twitter by politicians (especially of Imran Khan's PTI) or activists is also increasing day by day.

This paper will analyze milestone events in which the youth and politicians have used twitter to raise issues and bridge information gaps.

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Poster Session

Max Kramer (doctoral candidate, Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Germany)

"Representation of Kashmiri identities in digital films"

Abstract

The Kashmir-conflict is a foundational crisis of the Indian nation-state that touches some of the central tropes of Nehruvian nationalism: 'unity in diversity', 'secularism' and 'national integrity'. Today, the province is one of the most densely militarized zones worldwide with an infrastructure of bunkers located in the highly populated city centers of the valley, where stone pelting and the responding curfews (and many forms of censorship) are daily occurrences enfolding the valley in a state of immobilizing fear, rumors, and a sense of helplessness. Now, the agents of political change seem to be a networking generation of young women and men, born after the prime time of terrorist militancy from 1989-93, who are producing and circulating Kashmiri voices through various mediascapes. The thesis focuses on the articulations of Kashmiri subjectivities in digital film productions after the year 2001 through a transnational lens. It will engage questions concerning the global politics of film-form and film-address in a continuous dialogue with the filmmakers, the films, and their audiences. The heterogenous corpus of films suggests the detailed analysis of specific films, their aesthetics, production and reception, against the background of global shifts in media practices, film genres and styles. Inquiring into the complexities and intersections of film production and the filmic textures, the thesis will draw on the concepts of mobilities, as developed in transnational film theory (Shohat, Naficy, Ezra) and in the conceptual work of Gilles Deleuze.

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Lecture

Prof PhD Marwan M. Kraidy (University of Pennsylvania, USA)

"Plato's Digital Cave? The Arab Uprisings as Battles of Representation"

Abstract

In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato stages his famous allegory of the cave in which prisoners ascribe forms and meaning to shadows projected on the wall by a fire between them and the outside world, and mistaking these projections with reality. Like Plato's cave, the battles of representation unfolding in the Arab uprisings are haunted by shadows. Blogs and social media are in many ways a large echo chamber shared by the foot soldiers of the uprisings, cyber-dissidents, Arab and foreign intelligence agencies, and a motley crew of loose cannons and crackpots. In that version 2.0 of Plato's cave, words, sounds and images circulate, faceless, source-less, often without an address or a signature, challenging our ability to comprehend communication practices and casting a shadow of doubt over astonishing claims made about the power of digital media during the popular rebellions in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria and others.

Informed by 13 months of field research in the Arab world between June 2012 and August 2013, this paper develops the trope of "Plato's Digital Cave" to critically addresses deeper historical and epistemological factors that have shaped academic and journalistic discussions of the Arab uprisings, focusing on the role of media in social and political change. I will first discuss the hype surrounding media technologies in the Arab uprisings, then I will focus on previous revolutionary moments—the French Revolution in 1789 and the Egyptian Revolution of 1919—where revolutionaries used media creatively against entrenched power. Then the paper moves to a discussion of American modernization theory and the enduring framework it has created, in the US and worldwide, for understanding political change in the Arab world through a combination of technological determinism and historical presentism.

The main thrust of my paper is therefore an articulation of a history of media in Arab popular uprisings with an intellectual history of theories about Arab political change and the role of media in such change. Seeking an exit from the sterile determinism-presentism nexus, the last section of the paper advocates (1) an expansion of our understanding of what we mean by "media" to include the human body, which I argue is the indispensable medium in times of insurrection, and (2) the elaboration of a more complex view of representation that enables us to better understand communication and human agency in revolutionary times. The paper elaborates an "epistemology of the cave" as an overall approach for understanding media and communication in the Arab uprisings, and more generally, in rapid social and political change.

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Panel 4: Media Changing Identities: Focus on Gender and Generation

Dredge Kang (doctoral candidate, Emory University, USA)

***„Idols of Development: The Queer Convergence of New Media and Korean Dance
Performance in Thailand“***

Abstract

The Internet has facilitated the development of queer subcultures throughout Asia. Previous scholarship has focused on the globalization or localization of Western gay subjectivities and norms. It is clear, however, that new media also provides increasing opportunities for the restyling of localized gender/sexual norms using non-Western sources. In Thailand, new media is a tool for enacting queer identities that are coded as modern and “Asian,” where Japan and Korea come to represent aspirations for a different future. The Internet, social media, and other technologies arrived concomitantly with the Korean Wave, or the popularity of Korean entertainment media, thus contributing to an explosion in representations of queerness in Thai media. In this paper, I describe how new media flows enable the social phenomenon of Thai K-pop cover dance.

Cover dance is the copying of choreographed movements, gestures and timing to replicate a star’s music video or concert performance. These cover routines require video sharing sites for their circulation, both as a model for representation and as a documentation of live dance in social spaces. In Thailand, K-pop cover dance has become a popular activity among sissies (young effeminate gay men) and is organized into an extensive international contest circuit. Thai sissies who cover Korean girl groups are among the most prolific “prosumers” of K-pop; in addition to watching videos of K-pop girl bands, they also reproduce these videos in their own YouTube video responses. For example, cover dance groups such as the Wonder Gay have achieved national celebrity and caused a gender panic through their viral videos. In this paper, I examine the interrelationship between K-pop online and its reproduction in the social practice of Thai cover dance. I argue that Thai K-pop cover dance enables new modes of gender/sexual expression associated with East Asian developmental aspirations by providing a venue for Thai males to access and perform Korean cross-gender identifications. A close examination of K-pop cover dance in Thailand highlights recent shifts in inter-Asian pop-culture flows, uses of new media technology, and transgressive gender performance. In particular, it demonstrates the convergence of entertainment media with everyday recreational activity and novel ways of expressing gender/sexual identities.

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Panel 4: Media Changing Identities: Focus on Gender and Generation

Dr. Xenia Gleissner

"Women as Representations of Class and Modernity:

Gendered Public Visibility on National TV in the United Arab Emirates"

Abstract

This paper explores the framing of Emirati women in the public domain by analysing the role models circulated via state television in the United Arab Emirates. The analysis of gendered public visibility will show how class-distinctions within Emirati society are reinforced by the media.

Since its beginning in the 1970s, the government controlled media have strongly relied on a constructed image of an ideal Emirati citizen to promote the country's identity through visual media. The rulers in particular are represented as role models for the citizens. Accordingly, news presenters on national television are encouraged to follow the Sheikhs in mannerisms and attire whenever they appear on screen. Thus, their media appearances become part of the public image of the country's values and traditions. Unlike their male colleagues, however, female reporters are not provided with a female equivalent to the Sheikhs. Unlike the male rulers, female members of the ruling families remain shielded from the public eye. This selected display of gendered public visibility leads to disputes about the appropriateness of Emirati women appearing on screen.

Using an anthropological approach, this paper draws from interviews conducted with female Emirati TV presenters between 2010 and 2012. Their narratives illustrate how the government encourages women to partake in the public domain as symbols of the nation's modernity. Yet the absence of "first ladies" from the public simultaneously contradicts the supposed support of women in all spaces of public life. My paper uses the experiences of the news presenters to unravel the unspoken rules of gendered public appearance in the media. I will argue that the selected public visibility ultimately enforces existing class-distinctions in Emirati society, making the women symbolic embodiments of the hierarchical society. Whilst the TV presenters feel supported and liberated by their appearances in the national media, the absence of women from the public sphere is simultaneously enforced. By taking on the created role of TV personality, the female presenters become part of a constructed 'mass' carefully set apart from the ruling elite who draws its legitimacy from a purity of ethnic lineage. The voices of TV presenters illustrate that their compliance with the established structure enforces a national discourse which links between purity as a value and an ethnic Bedouin heritage.

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Panel 4: Media Changing Identities: Focus on Gender and Generation

Prof PhD Jesna Jayachandran (Assistant Professor, Guru Nanak Dev University, India)

"Debating rape in India: Readers comments in the online public sphere"

Abstract

This study examines online readers' comments on news about rapes that followed the gang rape of a young student in New Delhi in December 2012. The national discussions, protests and subsequent change in rape law that followed the incident does highlight that rape became a political issue of women's rights. At the same time the protests also drew attention to the role of social media in pushing, debating or driving sociocultural change in society. This article proposes to look at an area of social media that has been sidelined in the shadow of twitter and facebook, that is, online reader comments. Readers comments contribute to the complex and contested discourse on gender violence, even if we consider the limited population who participate online. Mostly, reader comments are a rich source to understand the meanings that common people bring to the public sphere. Unlike twitter and facebook, reader comments allow public participation of people without having to reveal their identity or other affiliations like family or friends. And unlike twitter it is a site that is often ignored by professional journalists who increasingly turn to other social media as a source for people's views and to construct stories. This paper will analyze comments on news on rapes in the web edition of the Times of India after the December gang rape. Using qualitative analysis, I will look at how reader debates on gender violence are framed in competing discourses that intersect across identity, caste, gender, religion and how politics are appropriated in discussions. The findings illustrate how readers also discuss denigrating views that are strongly communal, propagate further stereotypes and visibly demonstrate hate which would be considered inflammatory elsewhere in the sensitive Indian context. The findings reveal how social structures construct, implicate, mediate and contest rape debates in the online public sphere.

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Panel 5: Converging Media – Changing Practices: What is new about New Media?

Sarah McKeever (doctoral candidate, King's College, London, England)

„Mobile violence: Communalism in India and ICT Intervention“

Abstract

In 2012, communal riot violence in Assam, India spread from its local context to impact thousands of people from the North---East. Rumours of violence spread via text messages (SMS) and falsified images of reprisal violence were disseminated throughout the Internet. These actions eventually led to riots in major urban centres -- including Mumbai, Pune, and Bangalore -- and a mass exodus of people from the North---East. Increased access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in India has been hypothesized to be a positive development, specifically in the arena of democratic practice, the creation of new forms of democratic spaces and engagement, and access to economic and political information. However, when access and political discourse are inherently sites of inequality, this inequality is mapped onto the digital landscape. This does not ignore possible counter---narratives or the potential for change; it demonstrates that there is a vested interest, among political, media, and civic actors, in maintaining a discourse within India that frames events as communal. ICT can therefore act as an arena where coercive social relations are contested, controlled, and reified.

This paper makes steps towards generating a framework on the “performative” and “domesticated” aspects of ICT and its co---constitution of communal violence (Jeffrey and Doran 2013) by examining qualitative discursive evidence on the reporting of the Assam riots in 2012 and the Indian government’s reaction to communal threats transmitted through ICT, with a focus on mobile technology. It is suggested that ICT has been domesticated -- performing within the powerful discursive frame of communal riot and discursive event interpretation -- and acts as an arena of inequality and discursive control. The paper explores, using a qualitative discourse analysis of media and government reactions to the Assam riots as a preliminary case study, the government, civic, and media reactions to the use of ICT---transmitted communal threats in 2012. Further, it investigates the particular national, political, and social context of Indian communalism and the potential intervention into communal discourse posed by ICT, how ICT fits into historic media practices, and Indian government reactions to communal discourse. It proposes that though ICT opens new fields of relational interactions, when discourse and access is unequal, powerful discursive frames remain unchallenged, protected by vested interests. Change is possible, though not certain; in a country with extensive media control and a history of communal discourse, ICT may very well reinforce the very structures it is posited to undermine.

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Panel 5: Converging Media – Changing Practices: What is new about New Media?

Prof PhD Arnika Fuhrmann (Assistant Professor, Cornell University Ithaca, New York, USA)

"Shallow News in Depth": An Internet Television Intervention in Thailand

Abstract

This paper investigates the relations of new media to emergent political and social formations in Thailand. The centrality of new media to ongoing struggles over the constitution of the public sphere across Southeast Asian locations cannot be overstated. Thus while governments invest extensively into internet control, this realm also represents a primary site of political dissent and challenge to the authority of the state. New media and communications technologies have further engendered novel forms of intimacy, definitions of sexual citizenship, and notions of personhood and collectivity.

Taking the contemporary Thai internet TV program "Shallows News in Depth: Disdaining Your Intelligence" ("Jor Kaw Tuen: Du Thuk Sati Panya") as its case, this paper investigates how the program's contentious news critiques dissect current political events and social trends in Thailand. The paper focuses on how the program's aesthetic and performative choices relate to its political content. It is particularly interested in how Shallow News uses slapstick, jump cuts, cartoon visuals, and other elements from Thai popular media to produce nuanced critical news analyses and make incisive political interventions.

Shallow News' internet platform, its savvy commercial negotiations as well as its particular brand of humor have allowed it both to evade controls imposed on other media and to engage a broad audience spectrum. My interest lies in how Shallow News' specific register of humor and its deployment of aesthetic means allow for intervention into a political impasse: how does this program and its hundreds of thousands of viewers allow for the formation of alternate, radically critical platforms beyond the 'red' and 'yellow' camps that currently dominate Thai political life?

I further draw questions of critical content into relation to the show's turbulent history of reception: the paper pays special attention to the program's 'paradoxical' history of censorship and promotion and to the relation between Shallow News' digital platform and the show's remediation. Ultimately, the paper is interested in how considerations of the deployment of new media aesthetics, platforms, and economies present challenges to the ways in which political dissent and freedom of expression have been studied in Southeast Asia.

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Panel 5: Converging Media – Changing Practices: What is new about New Media?

Prof PhD Dina Abou Zeid (Associate Professor, Ain Shams University)

„Egyptian Comics on Facebook as a New Type of Citizen Media and Political Activism“

Abstract

Egyptians are well known in the Arab region with their sense of humor. They are fond of making fun of their crises and problems. They are experts in creating jokes about everything in life especially their problems. Their jokes are influenced by new media and technology. They create comics using Photoshop and different computers' programs. Then, they publish the comics on Facebook. In these last years especially after Egyptian revolution in 25 January 2011, citizens are creating pages on facebook to post and share comics created by any facebook user who sends comics to the admin of the page. These pages and comics have a great popularity and success among Egyptians besides their impact on citizen media and political awareness and participation. The comics come from citizens to citizens. The researcher analyzed 100 comics from "asa7be" which is the most popular comics' page on facebook among Egyptians. The page has created a main character to appear in all the comics. Also, the research study conducted a survey. The sample contains 100 Egyptian university students. The results show that most of the comics are about the government policies, president speeches, Muslim brotherhood leaders 'views and activities, political events, besides economic, social and political crises. The majority of the comics use Egyptian slang. All of them are colored and mainly use black, white, red and blue colors. When problems and crises increase in the Egyptian society, the comics increase on facebook. Most of the university students prefer these comics more than the ones that are created by professionals and published in newspapers and magazines. Interactivity with all its types and forms are found with these comics and pages. Through facebook comics, university students know the latest news and events even before knowing them from traditional media. The comics help the young generations to understand the impact of the government policies on their daily lives and on Egypt future. Asa7be page form students' opinions about political events. Moreover, comics encourage the young generations to talk about politics and express their political views in public and with friends. Furthermore, the comics are ways to express their anger and release their tension from political crises and situations in Egypt these days. Facebook comics urge the youth to participate in protests and demonstrations.

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Panel 5: Converging Media – Changing Practices: What is new about New Media?

Dr. Fritzi-Marie Titzmann (Postdoc, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

„Media mobility and convergence within India’s matrimonial market“

Abstract

When asking for the ‘newness’ of so called New Media, mobility features as a key notion in current discourses. With the ever-increasing mobility of emerging media formats and applications, mobility in turn reflects on media practices.

India’s matrimonial market undergoes a rapid process of medialisation, resulting not only in a boom of matrimonial websites but also in cooperation between the printing press, representing the traditional medium for matrimonial advertisement, television channels and Internet companies. Professional matchmakers revert to new strategies of cross-media marketing and offer their clients personal, online, and mobile phone services. They print catalogues, release TV advertisements and distribute calendars. Millions of young Indians (along with their family members) looking to find the perfect life partner, are simultaneously active on many media levels. With the advent of Web 2.0 they have become “producers” or “prosumers” (Bruns 2008) who consume/use the same media they actively fill with content. Examples of media-supported matchmaking illustrate several key components of “new” media: promptness, flexibility, immediacy of communication, and intergenerational differences in usage patterns.

Taking the example of Indian matrimonial media, this paper explores the dynamics of media mobility including cross-media-based strategies and practices as well as integrated multimediality in media production. It thus analyzes new media practices related to marriage matchmaking on two levels. First, the inter- and cross-medial strategies of matrimonial media production; Second, the communicative mobility of users and the multimedia paths they take to find marriage partners. The exploration of new media terrains in matrimonial matchmaking is shaped by the underlying question of the motivation that drives match-seekers and media professionals alike and the changes the new patterns may have on society and vice versa. Does the emerging multi-million-rupees matchmaking industry replace previous practices of mate-seeking or do we observe the advancement of a long existing trend of medialisation?